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Hueytown rugby player prepares for Paralympics

HUEYTOWN – A Hueytown resident was chosen as the youngest player ever to be selected to the 2008 U.S. Paralympics Wheelchair Rugby team. Joel Wilmoth, 18, will head to Beijing, China, to represent the United States in the 2008 Paralympic Games in September.

"I was in awe when I heard that I was selected," said Wilmoth, who is a quad amputee. "It was a real honor and very humbling. I am looking ahead to a lot of training to prepare for the games."

He started playing rugby three years ago at the Lakeshore Foundation. Someone told him he qualified to play and recommended that he try the fast-paced, hard-hitting game.

"I have always been sports-oriented," Wilmoth said. "It was really easy for me to pick up."

He learned about the Lakeshore Foundation while attending the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' Amputee Clinic, now called the Limb Deficiency Clinic.

He has been receiving services from the department's Children's Rehabilitation Service (CRS) division since he was 7 years old. The department has assisted him in getting prosthetic legs to use when he is not playing rugby.

"They practically watched me grow up. I go there and they help me to get prosthetics," he said. "If they hadn't helped me get them, I don't know what I would have done."

The Homewood CRS office will honor Wilmoth at a luncheon reception on July 21. Wilmoth will receive a Senate/House Joint Resolution recognizing his accomplishment.

The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services is the state agency whose mission is to enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential.